

# Flu Facts

Revised October 2004

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## About the flu vaccine...

Because the flu virus changes over time, you need to get a flu shot every year.

## Who should get flu vaccine when it is in short supply? *New!*

**Because flu vaccine is in short supply this year, it is important that flu vaccine be given to people most likely to suffer complications from the flu:**

- All children 6 – 23 months of age
- Everyone 65 years of age and older
- Pregnant women
- Everyone 6 months of age and older with chronic medical conditions, such as heart disease, asthma, diabetes, weakened immune systems, etc.
- People who live the same house or take care of an infant younger than 6 months of age.
- Health care workers who have direct contact with patients.

## Important: *New!*

Healthy people who are not at risk for complications from the flu should not get flu vaccine this year. We need the help of everyone to make sure that the limited amount of flu vaccine goes to those who truly need it most.

## There are 2 kinds of flu vaccine:

### The flu shot

The flu shot is made from killed vaccine. The flu shot can be given to anyone 6 months of age or older.

### The nasal-spray flu vaccine

The vaccine that is sprayed into the nose is a weakened live vaccine. Only *healthy* people who are 5 – 49 years of age should get the nasal spray flu vaccine.

## Simple steps you can take to protect yourself and your loved ones:

- Wash your hands with soap and warm water or use an alcohol based hand rub or gel frequently, especially after visiting public places or being in contact with anyone with a cold or the flu. Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth.
- Cover your mouth when coughing or sneezing. Turn your head (never cough in the direction of someone else) and cough or sneeze into a tissue. If tissues are not available, cough or sneeze into the inside of your elbow.
- Do not take young children, those with immune system problems or the chronically ill into large crowds unnecessarily when the flu is in your community.
- Avoid close contact (holding, hugging and kissing) with anyone who has a cold or the flu. Be very careful with children, as they are most likely to become sick with the flu.
- Stay home from work or school and avoid public activities for at least 5 (7 for children) days if you have symptoms of the flu.
- Do not share items that can spread germs and viruses, like drinking cups, straws, or other items that you put in your mouth.
- Clean things that are touched often in household, classroom and child care settings: door or refrigerator handles, phones, water faucets etc.

# About the flu...

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## What is the flu?

The flu is a very contagious disease of the respiratory (breathing) system. The flu is easily passed from one person to another by coughing and sneezing. It is usually very unpleasant, but for most people symptoms generally get better after 7 –10 days.

The flu usually starts very **suddenly** with:

- fever (from 102° – 104°) lasting 3 – 4 days
- headache
- severe muscle aches
- general weakness/extreme fatigue

These symptoms are accompanied by:

- dry cough
- sore throat
- runny or stuffy nose

## What to do if you have the flu:

- Rest in bed
- Drink lots of fluids
- Take non-aspirin pain relievers such as acetaminophen (e.g. Tylenol®) or ibuprofen (e.g. Advil®, Motrin®, etc.). Children and teens with the flu should never take aspirin as they may develop a rare, but serious disease called Reye syndrome
- Stay home and avoid public activities until your symptoms are resolved (usually 5-7 days)
- Talk with your health care provider if you are considering prescription drugs as they can have serious side effects in some people
- For extreme cases, visit your health care provider or the emergency department as soon as possible

Note: If you are at high risk for complications from the flu (see: *Who Should Get the Flu Shot?* on reverse side), you should consult your health care provider when your flu symptoms begin. Your doctor may recommend certain antiviral drugs to treat the flu.

## When should you see a health care provider?

You should see a health care provider or go to an emergency room immediately if you have any of the symptoms below:

- Severe or prolonged flu symptoms
- Rapid or labored breathing, or bluish skin
- Pain or difficulty breathing
- Cough with yellow sputum or phlegm
- Becoming sick again with fever and/or a worse cough after flu symptoms have improved
- Not drinking enough fluids

Parents should seek medical attention for infants and children that are:

- Not waking up; not interacting with others
- So irritable they do not want to be held

For more information about influenza visit, <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/> or <http://www.mass.gov/dph> or call the Massachusetts Immunization Program at 617-983-6800 or 888-658-2850.